



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

RELIGIOUS RESERVE

EDWARD F. HAYWARD

NATICK, MASSACHUSETTS

Two difficulties especially beset religion as a working force among thoughtful people. One is to find an adequate terminology, which shall somewhat nearly approach in expressive power the infinitely illusive realities with which religion has to deal. The other is to guard such a terminology, when once it has been accepted, from a too literal and insistent use. Nothing is so repellent to cultivated minds, for instance, as the too frequent familiarities which men take with the name of deity. Especially is this the problem of the one who has to deal professionally with religion, and who with all his handling of divine reality must not lose that which most truly characterizes it, its reticence and reserve. It is his function to declare the being of God, and to make real to others the relations which that Being sustains toward men. All other accomplishments on his part will fail without this fundamental fitness for impressing men with a sense of some one infinitely good and enduring above the passing shows of daily living. The true minister of religion is one who has walked and talked and lived with God. Amidst human limitation and change, the fixed lights of the Spirit for him stand out clear. For him at least, intellectual doubt and moral reaction have not dimmed the eternal verities of righteousness, truth, and love. The world remains for him God's world, whatever men may have done to deteriorate it morally; and he continually seeks to renew in others

a consciousness of this essential worth of life and to spur them to a greater realization of it in themselves.

The very attempt to do this, however, invites the danger of weakening the impression by straining the symbols and overworking the assurances of the Spirit. Religious experience and religious speech have not always been able to find common ground. The depth and reality of the one cannot always be converted into the objective power and effectiveness of the other. Even if the listener gets no sense of this impending danger, the speaker himself will feel it; and fortunate will be a clergyman, if he wholly escapes those Monday reactions which act upon the sensitive conscience as a warning that the safe limit of assertiveness has in his case already been passed.

It is not an edifying experience to hear a devout and conscientious minister of religion, healthy in body and mind, confess on Monday morning that the modesty and restfulness of agnosticism look attractive to him. All working ministers of religion must have felt at times this momentary appeal of materialism, and often the more so in proportion to the fineness of their spiritual insight and the general trustworthiness of their faith. Beyond a point, to make religious verities real to others is not to increase their reality to oneself, simply because so much more can be felt here than can be expressed, and because expression must ever bear such a delicate and often reactionary relation to the deeper experience of the mind and heart.

There is this, however, to be said, that a normal, unforced exercise of spiritual faculty for the purpose of increasing recognition of and reverence toward God, both for ourselves and for others, has no after-effects to fear. Speaking to and for each other is as natural and necessary here as elsewhere, where speechlessness may be at the risk of thoughtlessness, and where the

pressure of externalism upon our lives is so insistent and so distracting. In writing frankly to his friend, Dr. Bellows, Dr. Dewey finds in him a certain "want of spiritual depth and vitality." "Your nature," he says, "runs to social communions, to visible movements (to outwardness, in short), more than to the central depths within"; and he questions whether his friend has, in the same measure that he has other things, "that deep heart's rest, that quiet, profound, all-sufficing satisfaction in the infinite resource, in silent and solitary communion with God, settling and sinking into the soul, as into the still waters and the ocean depths."

And yet, with his love of expression and his faculty for definite, tangible results, Dr. Bellows was a much-needed force in the religious life of his time. Such men are quickeners of the moral sense. They stir the depths in others, however it may be with themselves, and make us see the dangers which beset all individualistic conceptions of duty, all piety of the merely contemplative sort. Without them and their arrestive word, current religion would become a stagnating pool, instead of a clear running stream which has the ocean ever in view. The religious life can no more afford to be anti-social than can the intellectual or the physical. The broad basis of our inspirational life is in our human relations, and we cannot hope to realize our thought of God if we cut ourselves off too much from our fellow-men. "So long," says Dr. John Tauler, "as thou hast a whole and undivided love towards all men, a share of the virtues and divine influences bestowed upon all flows out unto thee through them. But I tell thee, if thou dost sever any one from this universal love, thou wilt not receive the precious benefits of the outflowings of this love."

However guarded and sparing our anthropomorphism may have to be, we cannot altogether do without it. The very language of the religious emotions is a redeeming

element in our daily speech, which without some such lift and suggestiveness would greatly suffer in depth and richness of meaning. It is very noticeable in our language how large a part the word which stands for deity has to play. There is no department of literature, no field of oratory, no form of social intercourse, in which the thought and the name of God do not at least occasionally occur. No one can appeal to men, hoping to move them deeply and to call their whole nature into play, without making some use of the terminology of religion. There is so much that we can refer to no other source and suggest by no other means, that sometimes it is necessary for us to say *God*; and even if it does not stand for something vital to our inner consciousness, the word does at least convey that impression of the possible and unknown which is seldom if ever wholly absent from men's minds. The atheist himself, in the absence of any adequate substitute, has to fall back at times upon common social usage and repeat the word which throughout the world has a recognized value and a definite utility.

The facts of life and the necessities of speech seem to require the term *God*; and yet there is no word which makes such quick and certain reprisals upon him who overdoes its use. The Hebrews recognized this condition when they carefully removed their word for God from the commoner and more familiar usages of daily speech. *Yahweh* was a Power to be looked up to and feared, but not to be loved or taken liberties with. Nor was there at any time an effort to comprehend either his action or his character. "Who by searching can find out *God*?" The ways of *Yahweh* were indeed past discovery, nor had man even in his loftiest prophetic flight come near enough to understand his providence or realize his love. Any possible gain which might come from intimate personal communion with him would be more than offset by the attendant loss of dignity and

commanding power over the imagination of men. It was not so much the heart that was to be touched by the motives of religion as it was the will which was to be swayed; and this was felt to be better accomplished by preserving the natural distance at which God stands to man. And so the Hebrews resorted to circumlocution or to suggestive terms, when reference to their national deity was unavoidable.

A modern approximation of this position is found in the attitude which Goethe maintained toward religion. The poet was eighty-two years of age when Eckermann thus speaks of him: "He is far from supposing that he truly apprehends the Highest Being. All his oral and written utterances have inculcated the belief that God is an inscrutable Existence, whereof man has but approximate glimpses and presentiments. All nature and we human beings are, nevertheless, so penetrated with the divine element, that it sustains us, that in it we live, work, and be (are); that we sorrow and rejoice through the operation of eternal laws, which we fulfil and which are fulfilled in us, whether we perceive them or not. He is firmly convinced that the Divine Power is everywhere manifested and that the Divine Love is everywhere active."

There was something peculiarly offensive to a mind like Goethe's in the professional assumption and complacency with which the priestly class try to realize this power to the average intelligence and the average conscience of mankind. In another conversation with another individual he is reported as saying, "With the people and especially with the clergymen, who have him daily on their tongues, God becomes a phrase, a mere name, which they utter without any accompanying idea. But if they were penetrated by His greatness, they would rather be dumb, and for very reverence would not dare to name Him." This is a sweeping criticism, and indi-

cates in a sufficiently aggressive manner the dangers which Christianity invited in abandoning the safe reserves of Judaism. The moment that Jesus proclaimed a Heavenly Father in place of the mere governmental deity of his ancestors, he opened the door to a brood of religious monstrosities, and affected for worse as well as better the vocabulary of religious worship. It is not always that the earthly father succeeds in keeping the children that he loves in a proper attitude of intelligent respect and reasonable obedience, but it has proved a much more difficult task to teach a daily oneness and communion with God without infringing on the manifest reticence of deity and the proper humility of man.

So long as the Hebrew or the Puritan idea of fatherhood prevailed, the full danger did not appear; for parental affection, according to this conception, concealed its tenderness under an aspect of law and order and exacted from its dependents merely a silent and unquestioning obedience. But with the freer modern interpretation of fatherhood, which invites confidence and permits familiarity, it has not been so easy to eliminate the vices of anthropomorphism from private feeling and public worship. To go into the ordinary prayer-meeting or to attend many of our church services on Sundays, is to get the impression too often that the note of filial trust and devout affection is being decidedly forced in the interest of popular effectiveness. The tone of prayer and exhortation becomes at times offensively flippant, not to say irreverent. Deity is not only argued with and condescendingly enlightened as to human affairs, but even joked with and, as it were, patted on the shoulder. The assumption seems to be throughout that God looks upon His creatures with an alternating mixture of facetiousness and affectionate tolerance, and is to be exploited by them for possible blessings in the manner most likely to render Him complacent and generous. It

is as if long familiarity with the filial attitude had begotten a subtle sort of disrespect, as if, the weaknesses of Deity having been found out, the establishment of pleasant relations between the Divine and the human had become all too fatally simple and easy.

Somewhat the same result is reached by the modern turning from the sterner side of the Divine character to its softer and more attractive aspects. Walter Bagehot has warned us that "we must not be invited to approach the Holy of Holies without being made aware, painfully aware, what holiness is; we must know our own unworthiness ere we are fit to approach or imagine an infinite Perfection. The most nauseous of false religions," he tells us, "is that which affects a fulsome fondness for a Being not to be thought of without awe or spoken of without reluctance." The significant fact here is that it is the secular mind which thus recalls us to the severe and chastening phases of the character of God, without which religion ceases to be a real power for righteousness in the world. Mere speculative detachment never yet advanced the soul a step on its way to spiritual certitude or moral freedom. "It is not hard to know God, provided one will not force oneself to define Him," says Joubert. And again, "'Fear God' has made many men pious; the proof of the existence of God has made many men atheists."

Nor have the more enlightened methods of religious approach in our day always escaped the temptation to abuse the confidence which has been reposed in them. Indeed, the difficulty is present in nearly every form of stated worship—except that silent one of the Friends, which has thus far shown little adaptation to modern religious needs—that a free and familiar use of the name of deity shall degenerate into what Goethe calls a "mere habit of speech," as little available for purposes of spiritual communion as for those of practical religious effec-

tiveness. All this goes with that abomination, the professional tone, and with that air and manner and dress which are known as priestly; the more of which one succeeds in acquiring, the farther off the unaffected religious consciousness feels him to be from the simplicity of Christ and the real nature of God. The parrot-like repetition of what should be a sacred symbol not only weakens the truth for which it stands, but it tends at last to bring about a revulsion of feeling in the mind of speaker and listener alike.

The line which separates one who is familiar with deity from one who is *too* familiar is often so tenuous that it is not strange if sometimes devout people content themselves with the opposite extreme of a wholly impersonal approach in their worship of the True and Good. But this would be to only repeat the error of materialism, and to lose some of the finest fruits of religious experience. "Where spiritualism," says Joubert—and by spiritualism he means merely the spiritual consciousness—"where spiritualism employs the words *God, creation, will, divine laws*, the materialist is perpetually obliged to make use of abstract terms, such as *nature, existence, effects*. He feeds his mind on ghosts, without features, without color, without beauty."

This may indeed be preferable to the unconscious materialism of over-dogmatic statement, but the soul will never be nourished by spiritual negations or mere generalities of faith. "Take away belief in the self-conscious personality of God," says Tennyson, "and you take away the backbone of the world. On God and Godlikeness we build our trust." Even an ethical culturist like William M. Salter holds "that one of the needs of our time is some kind of constructive thinking that shall enable us to see and feel the Divine in the world once more, that shall again put us in the attitude of worship, and again lift us and make us strong in a strength

not our own." And yet we are told that Tennyson "dreaded the dogmatism of sects and rash definitions of God." "I dare hardly name His name," he would say; and accordingly in *The Ancient Sage* we remember he called Him the Nameless.

It has been said that "people treat it [the divine name] as if that incomprehensible and most high Being, who is even beyond the reach of thought, were only their equal. Otherwise they would not say the *Lord* God, the *dear* God, and the *good* God." It was Cotton Mather who remarked of Parson Brock, "He dwelt as near heaven as any man upon the earth. I scarce ever knew any man so familiar with the *great* God as our dear Servant Brock." There was an old fisherman on Star Island who used, as a pious duty, to ferry the people across from Appledore and Londoners whenever Parson Brock held divine service. His boat, however, became lost in a storm; and he resented what he considered to be shabby treatment on the part of Providence in view of the services which he had rendered to the cause of religion in the past. Cotton Mather tells us that Parson Brock met the old man's complaint with these words: "Go home contented, good sir. I will mention it to the Lord, and you may expect to find your boat tomorrow." Sure enough, the next day the boat was brought up from the bottom of the sea on the fluke of a vessel's anchor; and another help to unwholesome piety seemed to be afforded.

The gifted Lavater, the friend of Goethe, according to Lewes formed for himself even in childhood "a peculiar and intimate relationship with God, which made him look upon his playfellows with scorn and pity, because they did not share his 'need and use of God.' He prayed for wonders, and wonders came. God corrected his school exercises, and brought to light his virtuous deeds." Out in Denver, Colorado, home of advanced thought which is nothing if not able to "make good"

every time, there is an editorial writer (Thomas J. Shelton, in *The Christian* magazine) who apparently never feels the necessity of adding to his faith, humility. On the cover of a recent number of his magazine, *The Christian*, he has this confident approach to divine realities in the name of Friendship: "Make friends with Mammon. Money is a great friend. It all belongs to you. Make friends with it. . . . Above all, make friends in your mind. Shake hands with your thoughts. Call all your thoughts good. . . . Eternal friendship with everything! Shake, Old Universe! Let us all shake hands with God."

Considering the depth and poignancy of human need, and how in many a time of stress the Divine Sufficiency seems to hide from us and to disappoint our expectations, such exaggeration may not be wholly inexplicable to a patient and pitiful mind. Even the moral side of the Divine Character, so necessary for our guidance, has been providentially withdrawn from our commoner observation in order that that primary condition of human virtue, disinterestedness, might not be impaired. Man must still be able to shun the evil because it is intrinsically bad, and not because either the weight of universal public opinion or the punishment of God is too plainly in evidence against it. Convictions of duty and conceptions of religion vary among men apparently for this purpose, that, as Bagehot has shown, the freedom of our action and the purity of our virtue may not be destroyed.

In that masterly essay of Bagehot's on *The Ignorance of Man*, than which I know of few more stimulating deliverances of the human spirit, the part which this necessary ignorance of man plays in his development is fully indicated and the possible value of "a latent Providence, a confused life, a puzzling universe" made plain. And if, having no moral difficulties to trouble us, we are still oppressed by our intellectual inadequacy of proof, let us listen to "the shrewdest man of the world

who ever lived"—Lord Bacon—when he says, "If we begin in certainties, we shall end in doubts; if we begin in doubts, we shall end in certainties."

As it is the life of God which affects our life, so it must be in most part that we approach him in living ways. Any denial of this supreme reality of existence, be it by thought, word, or deed, must be fatal; none more fatal than that by speech. When some philosopher shall do for blasphemy what Professor Royce has done for loyalty—blasphemy which, in denying God, denies the sources of our life and strength—we shall understand why Jesus spoke as he did against this impiety. But to claim a certain knowledge of God is not necessarily to assert that such knowledge is always communicable to others. Least of all is it always communicable by word of mouth. Our confidence and affection here happily have other means of demonstration than the spoken word. If we are at one with God, there will be the witness of our whole walk and conversation. Definite and formal confession will seldom be needed, the eloquent *life* being generally chary of verbal expression.

The same law should govern us with respect to that other great religious word, the name of Christ, which has greatly suffered in the common usage of the churches. The reverent admirer and would-be follower of Jesus often comes to share in Emerson's reaction against that "noxious exaggeration," which applies to person and name alike. And yet the life, the character of Christ, have an almost unlimited adaptability to human need. The *name* has, indeed, been made to serve many conflicting purposes, and many times historical accuracy has been sacrificed to immediate and superficial effects. But there is something here which is better caught and preserved by reticence than by unrestrained assertion, a deep heart of meaning and power into which one grows by silent meditation, by obedience, and by the quiet

reserves of faith. By this name, so dear and so influential in the better life of Christendom, we still must conquer. What we need is to hold the word up to its best; by moderating the frequency and modulating the tone with which we mention the name of Jesus, to avert the danger of reactionary sentiment which has not disappeared since Emerson's day.

Religion must doubtless be looked at from two points of view. As an instrument of practical effectiveness among men, and as a private and personal experience, it may at times call for varying methods of expression. The essentially illusive quality, the somewhat rare and remote character of the emotion, however, always remain. And always there remains also a certain pity that so high a sentiment should ever need to be taken out of the inner circle, the more intimate and secret enclosures of our life, to suffer public exposure and the indiscriminate handling of a professional cult. Religion is so essentially a private and personal concern, and so much remains for faith and trust to do in even its most confident assertions, that the sense of its reality cannot but suffer from the rude touch of familiarity. Not even science has done as much to weaken spiritual certainty in our day as the dogmatism of theology and the unwarranted assumptions of the elect.

The very existence of such a word as agnosticism, together with the fact to which it corresponds, is an indication of this unfortunate tendency. We know that an age which coins such a word and gives it currency must have succeeded an age of over-assertiveness in theology. To have staked all on a complete and infallible system of doctrines and to have attempted an actual topography of heaven, was to invite inevitable reactions such as we have seen.

The human mind, indeed, is all too easily antagonized in these concerns of the spirit. Its devotional appetite

can be forced, or it can be over-indulged, to the point where indifference to stated worship sets in. The object to be sought in any wise ordering of religious observance is, of course, to create and satisfy a healthy spiritual hunger without inducing revulsion or satiety. In proportion to the elevation and intensity of the emotions involved will always be the difficulty of the task. A church, for instance, which can do its work, and show a people, reverent, peaceable, and pure, and at the same time not infringe the threefold character of Sunday as a day of religion, rest, and recreation, has found the better part of public worship. Rest and recreation may be helpful conditions of religion, by freeing its observances from strain and correcting any tendency to over-insistence, both of which threaten the effectiveness of the church in an age of clear seeing and thinking such as ours.

Even of individuals it is true that we most value them for their reserves; and God has infinitely blessed us in what He has held back from our knowledge and denied to our utterance. Fully as much by the divine reserves as by the divine revelations does He humble our conscience and energize our will.

Let there then be prophets of the divine reticence, teachers who make clear that eye hath not seen nor ear heard nor hath it entered into the heart of man what God hath prepared for them that love him. For purposes of dogma we know little about God. Spiritually, however, He stands to us for certain transcendent facts and forces of life; for the realities of communion, for enlightenment to see and inspiration to do, for inward strength and hope and courage. All this and more we must ever associate with the Sacred Name. That name will never cease to stand for a great constructive possibility of experience, even though the best part of our deliverance concerning it remains what we do not say. The

age-long effort to feel after God, in faltering words, if haply we may find Him in experimental fact, will go on as of yore. But let us hope that it will proceed with less of unhealthy extravagance and extreme than in the past. To seek here, as Jesus said, is to find. To draw near in reverence and humility is at least to feel dimly the mighty influences of the Spirit. The work of the mystic is not yet done in life. The quietist has his office still, to purify our vision and revive our faith. Perhaps we shall never get farther along in our religious progress than the attitude and spirit of the German divine, who after many hours of labor in his Master's service, always closed the day with the one prayer, "All is as ever, Lord, between me and Thee."